

Complications Cause Measles Case Troubles

The seriousness of measles lies not so much in the disease itself as in the complications that may develop with it. While the condition still appears in epidemic proportions, fortunately deaths from it, usually in the age group under three, have been greatly reduced.

Symptoms of measles usually appear from 10 to 14 days after exposure. Initially they resemble those of the common cold, such as sneezing and coughing, but they also include the appearance of small bluish-white spots surrounded by an inflamed redness in the mouth. These are called Koplik's spots, named after the late New York pediatrician who identified them.

THE DISEASE is most contagious when the symptoms resembling the common cold are present. This threat is lessened once the rash develops, purplish-red in color, appearing first on the face, then the body trunk and on the legs and arms. Once the rash is in "full bloom," so to speak, other symptoms disappear gradually.

Usually one attack of measles renders a person immune for life. There is no protective vaccine against measles, although there are certain substances that can be given that will minimize the attack, or sometimes prevent its development, if exposure to the disease is a certainty.

THESE substances which are injected are convalescent serum, which is obtained from the blood of patients recently recovered from measles; pooled adult serum which includes certain protective properties found in blood of adults who have had measles; human immune globulin, which is extracted from the placenta or afterbirth, the structure which attaches a newborn baby to his mother, and gamma globulin, which is a by-product of blood secured by blood banks to manufacture blood plasma.

The complications that may develop with or immediately after measles make it a serious disease. They include infections of the eyes, the nose and throat, the bronchial tubes and even the digestive tract. After the minute virus responsible for measles attacks, other organisms normally present in the body take over. Thus, such germs as the staphylococcus or pneumococcus may launch the respiratory invasion.

BECAUSE IT IS communicable, certain precautions are necessary in the care of the patient with measles. The child must be isolated. All people except the mother or person caring for the child should be kept out of the sickroom. Extreme cleanliness should be observed. All discharges from the sick child's nose and throat should be caught on disposable tissue or cloth and placed in a paper bag pinned to the bed. The bag should be burned, unopened. All washable objects used by the sick child should be boiled in soap and water after each time they are used.

The child with measles can be a sick youngster, and potentially susceptible to some other complication. If your child has been exposed to measles, don't hesitate, call your physician.

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